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ABSTRACT

To help educators improve school publications, this handbook discusses the reasons for school publications and presents guidelines for their production. Chapter 1 notes that school publications' purpose is to communicate. Chapter 2 discusses where to begin school publications and suggests focusing on people, making the publication's purpose obvious, using photographs, avoiding crowded pages, scheduling projects and staying on schedule, and being wary of expensive special effects. The same chapter reviews the factors involved in selecting paper, urges the school publisher to find helpers, lists school publications needing more attention (including memos, student publications, curriculum guides, student handbooks, award programs, report cards, and news releases), stresses the avoidance of sex bias and racial stereotypes, advises careful use of "amateurish art," discusses distribution methods, and recommends ways to obtain product recognition. Chapter 3 advocates producing different publications for different publics; examples include building-level newsletters, school-community activity calendars, annual reports, and guidance publications. Guidelines for evaluating publications are presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 briefly summarizes the handbook, and seven appendices provide sample specification sheets, type sizes and faces, and page and cover layouts, as well as writing tips. (RW)

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

BASIC SCHOOL PR GUIDE

Publications For Effective Communications

EA 015 213

One in a series of eight school public relations guides which contain concise, tested and practical ideas.

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National School Public Relations Association

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Introduction

NSPRA's **Basic School PR Kit,** of which this guide is a part, is designed to provide specific, practical help for educators in starting or improving school PR programs. The Kit has been developed in response to the hundreds of requests for help NSPRA receives each year. Material on vital public relations topics is presented in the most concise, usable format possible.

The basic concept of public relations is explained on cassette tape by Edward L. Bernays, the man who pioneered the field of public relations in the 1920s. Important school PR topics are covered in detail in eight tightly-written guides. Additional materials are included in a resource packet containing public relations standards, proven ideas that work, and a PR planning guide and worksheet.

Altogether, the **Basic School PR Kit** is a short course in school PR fundamentals, a refresher for existing programs, a ready reference for dealing with problems that arise and a resource for anyone working to build public confidence in education.

This guide, *Publications For Effective Communications,* tells you how to plan and develop publications that will assure readership. A publication, whether newsletter, bulletin, brochure, or annual report reflects the image of your school or district. If you work with a limited budget or substantial funds, you will find suggestions and examples in this guide to help improve your publications.

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This Kit was developed by John H. Wheatley, executive director of the National School Public Relations Association, and Virginia M. Ross, director of school communication services, who edited the material. It was produced by Kim F. Hasten, manager of editorial and production services, with special technical and production assistance provided by Barbara Acosta, Jean Berger, Judi Cowan, Mary Ann Johnson and Norma Meyer. The graphics in the Kit were developed by Susan R. Eason of Eason and Associates and Kim F. Hasten.

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Chapter 1
School Publications

School publications range from basic black on white mimeographed newsheets to four color pieces with crisp graphic. and award winning photos. School publications can be beautifully designed and poorly written. They can be written by an author who has obviously mastered the nuances of language yet failed to design an eye-catching, attention-holding publication.

Few school people can hire talented free-lance designers, photographers or graphics consultants. Most school people must rely on their own talents and the skills of parent volunteers, teachers and students. The building principal is expected to publish attractive and informative school bulletins and reports, yet few have the expertise required. This booklet should make life easier for the school "publisher."

Let's Begin at the Beginning. Why Publish?

We publish to circulate basic information — to create understanding, to help share the opinions of our readers — and to establish a favorable image for our institutions and the people who staff them.

We publish to communicate. We know we communicate through our written materials and by our human contacts. Our experience tells us that we usually get minimal feedback from our publications and instant reaction from our human relationships. If we want to distribute lots of facts, we publish. If we want to learn how others are feeling about a topic, we ask them in a **face-to-face dialogue.**

We publish — too often — because we are expected to publish. Our employers expect us to maintain the publication schedule established by those who sat at our desks before us. We rarely publish because we are inspired. We rarely publish because of our enthusiasm. When we do, the result is most often a joy for the author and reader alike.

In our good moments we ask ourselves — Who will read this? What do they need to know? How do I want them to feel about this publication? How can I assure positive results from my efforts? In our hurried and less thoughtful moments we simply fill the space with the most readily available material.

We publish to help people understand our programs. We tell them what they need to understand so they can become involved. We attempt to gather support. We enlighten. On rare occasions we may need to justify the actions of the institution and its people. We publish to record "history."

Good record-keeping facilitates good writing. The value of adequate notes and carefully maintained files and reference materials is already understood by most authors.

The school publisher should develop topical files, seasonal files and useful files.

Chapter 2
Where Do We Begin?

We begin with our notes, our thoughts, our clips and **our needs.** The biggest need is the need to get started. Many a good publication has yet to be produced because the author couldn't get started. We begin with our design sketches. We begin with our pre-conceived notions about how our publication should look.

Most authors and designers begin with an assortment of ideas collected from other publishers. Most school publishers have a few sample newsletters and special topic publications from other schools. It's good to know what we like and what we don't like about

the "competition." If it works for them it must have its positive points. If we can build upon the experience of others, we should.

When we design a basic typewritten newsletter we must decide on line length and column width. We must begin to establish our "style." We should make some conscious editorial decisions. Will we use student art? Will we use photos? Can we use clip art?

With a more sophisticated and demanding project at hand we begin by thinking about "tone" and the feeling we want to convey to our reader. Should the piece appear inexpensive, or is it that rare occasion which requires the appearance of obvious expense? Fortunately, school people rarely face the challenge of making a publication look more costly. We almost always need to convey a feeling of fiscal responsibility, modest budgets, and the wise allocation of publication funds.

We begin with our "dummy" . . . our mock-up . . . our prototype. Usually we fold paper. Hold it vertically — then horizontally — consider an unusual size, then return to the most conventional 8½ x 11 inch size. We consider the number of pages we need —always think in multiples of four — and try our best to stay within 32 pages (excluding cover, unless self-cover).

If we expect to get competitive prices or informal quotations from our printer, we will need some definite ideas about the number of photos, the amount of typesetting required, and special effects. It's good to have a paper sample, know your ink color numbers and have some firm expectations for the project before visiting the printer. The printer will need to have realistic deadlines for delivery of the finished project.

The school publisher should develop some minimal printing specifications even if the business office people don't require such. (See Appendix A for sample specifications.)

Many authors keep a notepad or index file cards with them at all times. Since ideas usually appear at inopportune times it's important to be able to record the idea before it's lost. A number of school administrators have begun using miniature pocket recorders to capture thoughts while driving — or at least while waiting for traffic lights to change. More and more school newsletters are being written as a hurried author speaks into a tape recorder small enough to fit into a shirt or jacket pocket.

What Comes First? Copy or Design?

Each school publisher, whether building principal or communication specialist, must begin to work with the available material.

Usually the copy is available first, and consideration must be given to various design possibilities. On rare occasions the publication is "designed" before it is written. There's nothing wrong with having a format in mind, or a rough layout to fit copy around. Most designers want to see the copy. They want to get a feeling for the amount of written material required, the writing style, and the ways in which the copy can be divided. Writers like to know how much space will be available and how the designer intends to use the copy.

Whenever writers, designers and photographers can work together as collaborators, the result should be a solid, balanced publication. It is best when each participant in the publication process has some definite ideas while remaining flexible to the concerns of others who will participate in the creative process.

Let's review — we begin with a need, a good idea, an attitude about the task, and a commitment to the publication. We develop a theme, a rough sketch, an outline, a "dummy" and a budget.

Each publication needs to have a clear "voice." Too often we read school publications in which the principal writes using the first person on the same page with articles written in the third person. Most of us are uncomfortable with articles which tell us "you will enjoy the program." We tend to feel we should decide that for ourselves. It's much better to write that Mrs. Jones (the principal) said "Most parents should enjoy the program because . . .."

Some school people have a tendency to write to parents, and others, as though they were instructing a class. "You will," or "you should," or "your children" are direct — and sometimes most appropriate. But this style has limited appeal and becomes tiring. Decisions must be made. Will we write: "your children," "the children," "our children" or simply "the students?" Who will read the article? Will it be read by students, parents, grandparents, teachers and other staff members? Will the language be appropriate for all readers — including the superintendent, the board members, and local community representatives? We should analyze our readers and write in a voice which is appropriate for all.

Focus on People

Our school publications should feature students learning, teachers teaching, and other staff members doing what they are hired to do. We focus on what people do in schools. We interpret why they do, how they do, and how they succeed. We explain why people are successful. We must remind ourselves that we aren't

selling toothpaste or hamburgers. We're explaining to parents and other interested people that we have a solid program which involves people.

We all know that people are interested in other people. Few people are interested in buildings, or policy manuals, or statistical reports. Readers are interested in how people work in buildings —who wrote the policies and how the policies affect students — and how the statistics will be used by the staff. Readers respond to quotes. Quotes should be short and conversational. Photos should be carefully cropped to "zoom" into the action — **to feature the person.**

Allow the Purpose To Be Obvious

Every publication is produced to achieve a purpose — or a variety of objectives. As we prepare our publications we should be thinking about the purpose. We should continually ask ourselves "why are we doing this?" If the purpose is to explain —we must understand what explanation readers want or need. If our purpose is to entertain — we should be sure we keep it light, pleasant, attractive, and "easy."

When our purpose is instructive and we want to teach people about our programs, we need to ask ourselves how much we can tell them without losing them. Too often we tell them more than they want to know and the publication has few readers who get beyond the first paragraphs or pages.

We have all seen school publications which appear to have been produced simply to meet a publication schedule. The reader gets the feeling it was time to do it, so they did it — but they weren't inspired, or excited or feeling any urgency about the project. School publications should be created only when there is a clear need, an obvious purpose, and ample justification for the project.

Some Publications Begin With Excellent Photographs

The importance of photographs must be emphasized. We've all said a picture is worth a thousand words, but we fail to practice what we know. If photographs communicate better than words — and in many cases they do — then we should use more photos and fewer words. We don't need to write that pupils enjoy their learning experiences if we prove that with the generous use of photos.

School publications can be designed (and written) to effectively mount a photographic essay.

When a publication includes strong photos, it will have an appealing quality which attracts and holds the interest of readers. Careful attention to the selection and display of photographs will pay off. Small photos are rarely effective. People respond to large candid photos.

Avoid Crowded Pages

Most of us try to put too much on a page. We feel we should use all available space for copy, art or photographs. We all need to learn how to make more effective use of white space. We need to give the readers' eyes a place to rest — a place to refocus and make the transition to the next display.

Too much copy, and too many photos, cause the reader to feel overwhelmed, tired, confused, or, at best, uncomfortable. We need to get rid of the cluttered design and feature the beauty of our words and photos. Simple designs encourage readers. Complex designs bewilder readers.

In our special topic publications we should keep at least 20% of each two-page spread open for "breathing room." Some designers might argue that 30% for white space is a better average.

School district writers and publishers have too long felt that they had to fill every line, margin to margin, in a publication to justify the expenditure of funds. It would be a better expenditure of funds to make certain that the material is attractive, and so presented that readers will be brought into the story.

Attractive typography requires appropriate selection of type size and type style. Generally speaking, body type should be 9, 10 or 11 pt. (most pica typewriter print used for many newsletters and bulletins is 9 pt.) for ease in reading. Space between lines and columns of copy is equally important. Columns should be surrounded with sufficient margins to "frame" the content and separate it from other design elements.

Copy lines should be no longer than two alphabets (or 52 characters). Many readers prefer a copy column approximately three inches in width, or shorter.

Careful attention to proofreading must be a top priority. Many well-designed pages have been spoiled by glaring typos. A misspelled word shouts at the reader and detracts from the overall credibility of the entire publication.

Crisp, logical copy gets results. Good copy not only makes the pitch — it closes the sale. The writer must review, revise, rewrite and

solicit reactions from trusted critics. The copy should be challenged for its completeness, authenticity, and correctness, **before it is sent to the typesetter.** Proofreader corrections and editorial changes will be very expensive if the writer has the material set in type before it is sufficiently challenged.

Those of us who feel pressed by deadlines must remind ourselves — if it's worth doing, it's worth doing well. Time spent in checking copy for misspelled names, correct lists, and overall accuracy is time well spent. Since many school publications become historical documents for future reference, it is especially important that names, dates, and certain events be accurately recorded. An error can be copied into future publications before it is caught. It should be caught the first time.

Each office and each school usually has among its staff members at least one person who is an expert proofreader. That individual should be asked to read everything which will be published. Frequently authors and typists don't find the most obvious errors.

Since content errors are more difficult to find than typos, the person who gets the final proofreader assignment should be a well-informed generalist who reads with the consumer's point of view.

Schedule the Project and Stay on Schedule

Our publication schedule begins with the needs assessment. First we learn about the needs of those who will receive the publication. Most often this will be an informal survey — conversations with trusted colleagues a representative number of students, parents, or other consumers.

After learning about the need, and surveying our idea file, we can make our publication schedule. Posting the schedule on the office wall helps to keep most authors "on schedule." A typical schedule includes: (1) ideas gathered, (2) rough design begun, (3) outline complete, (4) first draft typed, (5) second draft "approved," (6) copy to printer, (7) dummy finalized, (8) proofread gallevs, (9) approve blue line proofs, (10) press run, and (11) delivery distribution.

These steps are equally important whether the publication is sent to a commercial printer or a large district print shop. Materials being printed on school mimeographs, or xeroxed for multiple distribution, should follow the same process. Make certain to

proofread, one last time, the first copy off the press — mimeograph, xerox and even ditto.

Every schedule needs enough flexibility to permit the author to discard everything and start again. No matter how far along the project may be, we sometimes find that we must stop everything and begin again. When we reach that point, there is no alternative — we must stop, discard, and correct our problem. Failure to do so could easily cause many problems for many people. We should not knowingly publish incorrect information. Serious errors must be corrected regardless of cost. The costs related to living with errors are frequently much higher than the costs of starting again.

When mistakes are published for everyone to read, we have lost our credibility. There is no way we can put a price on the integrity of the publisher's (school or district's) reputation. We all know people who routinely supply excellent flawless copy. Sadly we know others whose work cannot be respected. We must challenge everything they give us.

A desire for perfection is of utmost importance to everyone associated with school publications. We need to strive for the perfect publication. As we rewrite, redesign, and critique our own work we achieve levels of success we thought were impossible.

Special Effects Are Very Expensive

Those who create school publications sometimes get carried away and want the special effects we see in the annual report of a major industry or the promotional materials produced by other profit-making business people.

When in doubt, we should avoid costly special effects such as embossed covers, custom die cuts, deckle-edge paper, tissue insert pages, etc. Use of any of these special effects should be considered for only the most unusual publication — the 25th anniversary booklet, or similar unique event.

Printers should be questioned very thoroughly about the costs of any special aspects of the job which could potentially double or triple the cost of the project.

Paper Selection Is Always Important

Every project is produced best on a specific type of paper. Those who select paper should be cautious about the advice of a

favorite printer who might be inclined to sell a "wrong" paper because of its immediate availability or the possibility of a "bargain" price.

When a newsletter which should have been printed on a 60 lb. offset "house paper" is printed on a textured or cover stock, the customer loses in several ways. The knowledgeable critic will know how wrong the paper is — while the less knowledgeable critic may think that "expensive" paper is being used. Sometimes school administrators can't use the "bargain" paper because it's wrong —and looks expensive. Many administrators or school PR officers have been severely criticized for publications which "look too expensive."

Several characteristics of paper should be considered by those who select it for school publications. These characteristics include: weight, brightness, opacity, grain, bulk, and surface.

Weight is calculated by the ream — 500 sheets. A fixed size is assigned to each type or grade of paper. For example, book grade paper is 25 x 38 inches. The weight refers to how much 500 sheets of paper that size would weigh. In this example the paper stock is "70 pound" because 500 sheets 25 x 38 inches weighs 70 pounds. Many brochures and pamphlets are printed on paper with a weight of 50 to 100 pounds. This text paper weight differs from cover stock which usually runs from 65 to 80 pounds. Since the basic size for cover stock is 20 x 26 inches (not 25 x 38), it follows that 80-pound cover stock is much heavier than 80-pound text stock.

Brightness is important because a bright white sheet reflects more light, improves the contrast range and therefore improves the quality of any photographs which may be used. An enamel gloss paper will display handsome photographs much better than a standard offset paper.

Opacity is important when "show-through" would detract from the appearance or readability of the publication. Lightweight papers usually have some degree of show-through. Heavier papers are usually more opaque. The general rule is the heavier the paper, the greater the opacity, or the less one can see through the sheet. It is a good idea to test the opacity of the paper before making a final selection.

Grain requires discussion because paper will tear and fold easiest if parallel with the grain direction. On a paper machine, the majority of wood fibers lie in the direction in which the machine is running. The result is termed paper grain. Folds will be more accurate, pages will lie flatter, and the paper will be easier to handle

when the grain direction runs parallel to the spine (back) of the finished piece.

Bulk is the thickness of the paper. The number of pages per inch determines the bulk. Some card stock measures 12 pages per inch. Bible sheets might measure 1300 pages per inch. A paper should have the appropriate amount of "bulk" for the job. A rough-surfaced paper will add bulk to a booklet and make the piece seem to be more than it would if a smooth-surfaced paper had been selected.

Surface is important not only when considering bulk, but when considering the quality of photographs on paper. Rough-surfaced paper will absorb more ink and leave dark areas gray and dull. A coated sheet will print rich dark tones more effectively. The quality of photographs will be lessened if printed on rough paper rather than coated.

Finding Helpers Can Be Easy

A basic school communications program is a carefully planned effort with staff members identified for specific tasks. The ideal situation includes full-time, well-trained publications specialists. Many school administrators must find volunteers because the district — due to size, budget, and/or attitudes — will not hire information/public relations/publications staff.

What can the already overworked and understaffed administrator do about publications?

1. Understand the importance of publications. Demonstrate that school publications are important.
2. Invite a small student/faculty/parent committee to join in a review of the "products" of the past year.
3. Invite a community advisory committee to meet monthly, quarterly, or as needed for review of school publications problems. Include a newspaper reporter, PR-type employees from local industry, and parents with related education or experience.
4. Rank publications according to priority. Improve only one at a time — one each year if that is all that is feasible. (Don't try to do it all at once.)
5. Advocate that appropriate teachers be given extra-duty contracts to write about, edit, or photograph the school story. Make a visible commitment to improved publications.

6. Identify student writers and photographers who can be given released time to work on school publications. Schedule students during club period, activities period, or half-days for senior career study program.
7. Arrange with parent volunteers for writing, editing and photography.
8. Be sure to use student newspaper and yearbook staffs as much as possible.
9. Arrange with local newspaper photographers to buy extra prints for use in school publications.
10. Develop comprehensive office photo file.
11. Build file of good publications from other schools. Always be able to show that others already do what you strive to accomplish.

Some "Publications" Are Overlooked

We publish things each week which don't usually get included on our list of school publications. Let's think together about some publications which need our attention. The following list includes some of our routine "products."

Which publications need attention most?

1. **Memos and letters.** These should be attractive and concise. (Too often school memos and letters sound as though they were dictated by a frantic administrator.)
2. **Student newspaper.** Are staff members quoted? Is the principal's opinion sought? What is the relationship between the principal and the student newspaper staff?
3. **Student yearbook.** Are staff members photographed in a good setting? Is the principal quoted saying anything of value?
4. **Curriculum guide/program of studies.** Descriptions of academic program must be viewed as the **single most important publication.** Explaining the program is our top priority.
5. **Student handbook.** The orientation materials given students are second in importance to the curriculum materials.
6. **Award/Commencement programs.** These publications describe our "finished product." They must be absolutely correct for their historical value.
7. **Report cards.** Appearance is very important. Is there anything "warm" or humane about your format? Whether mailed or carried by students — the report card is often a cold computer printout "untouched by humans."

8. **News releases.** Are releases carefully written on attractive preprinted forms?

Avoiding Sex Bias and Racial Stereotyping

The photographs we use in school publications should be carefully selected to reflect a racial mix appropriate to the community. Students of all racial backgrounds should be photographed in situations which are completely free of racial or ethnic stereotyping. We must be alert that we don't photograph **only** black students in certain classes — **only** white students in other classes (or **only** Asian students in ESL classes).

If 10 percent of the student population is black it is reasonable to expect to find photos of at least one or two black students in each school publication.

If 90 percent of the student body is white, it is reasonable to expect the majority of students photographed (as many as 9 out of 10) to be white.

Sometimes we attract the attention of critics by publishing school photos with a student racial mix unlike our school population. We should be alert to avoid falling into this "trap."

Boys and girls should be shown in classroom settings which avoid sex stereotyping. To photograph **only** boys in industrial arts, or **only** girls in sewing and cooking classes, reinforces sex stereotyping and eventually helps to limit equal opportunities for boys and girls. We should be alert to these concerns before we take our photographs. It is often too late to get good photos when the printer's deadline is upon us.

Avoiding Use of "Amateurish" Art

Many good school publications have been spoiled by art work contributed by well-intentioned staff members. Student art (and faculty/ parent art) can make or break a school publication. It's very difficult to tell the art teacher the drawing "isn't good enough to be used on the cover." Most often we use it even if we don't like it.

School people seem prone to ask for student art or teacher produced art to brighten school publications. The art which is used often detracts from the graphic impact, appears to clutter the design, and frequently makes the publication look too childish.

Student art can be "whimsical" — and help to create a pleasant

"mood." It can be very appropriate. It can become a "trademark" of our publications. It should always be used sparingly and with considerable caution.

The use of "clip art" can help to brighten school publications and make them more attractive and readable. Clip art is usually purchased from a mail order service which specializes in drawings catalogued by theme, season, and/or specific subject. The drawings are usually black on white, camera-ready, and of high quality.

Clip art services include borders, stock cover designs, a variety of sizes of calendars, numbers, alphabets, etc. Specific subject areas of interest to school people can be obtained without purchasing an entire clip art "library" or series.

Most printers have clip art catalogues which are made available for customers' use. Local newspapers may also be willing to share some limited clip art, but the art services purchased for use by the advertising department may be of little use to the school publisher.

DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATIONS

A good rule — or standard procedure — is to make sure everyone inside the organization has had a chance to see the finished publication before it is distributed to outsiders. Teachers should have copies before parents. Custodians and cafeteria workers should have copies before their next door neighbors.

It should be required that copies are available to all staff members before any are distributed to people outside the school family. There is no point in giving staff members reason to say to people in the community "they never tell us anything" or "we're always the last to know."

Distribution of school publications with students as our couriers can be very expensive — and frequently wasteful. Whenever we elect to avoid postal costs we also risk a high percentage of copies lost and/or destroyed before they get to our readers.

We know the take-home rate diminishes as the students get

older. Younger students have a very high "delivery" rate. After fifth of sixth grade the delivery rate drops rapidly.

If the publication is worth producing, it is worth guaranteeing delivery.

Use of presort first class or bulk rate mailing permits should be carefully studied. The coordination of mailings must become a top priority for all school administrators. When mailings to parents are carefully planned, when needs are anticipated and several items are sent together, or written into a building-level newsletter, the cost savings will be obvious. In many schools a quarterly mailing (bulk rate postage) will be sufficient to meet all needs for providing information to parents.

A suburban Minneapolis school system has developed an effective "hand delivery system for district publications." Once printed they are delivered to a senior citizen center where they are stuffed into bright pre-printed plastic "door-hanging" bags. The senior group stuffs the bags which are then hung on each door in neighborhoods throughout the community by members of area Girl Scout troops.

Some school publications should be made available only to those who ask for them. Examples might include the annual report, citizens' advisory council report, budget analysis, study of standardized test results, etc. These special publications are not of general interest. A coupon in the district building-level newsletter or an advertisement in the local newspaper following an item about the material (including a coupon to be clipped and returned to the appropriate school office requesting the publication) is an excellent way to provide this material to those interested.

School people must be extremely careful about providing people with special publications they don't need — don't want — and/or consider "a waste of money." Whenever people **ask for a particular publication** they begin to feel some involvement in the total process.

With rising postal, paper and printing costs, it is important that we review our distribution procedures annually. Certain publications should include a coupon or postcard which encourages readers to ask to be removed from the mailing list if they are no longer

interested in receiving a particular publication. Some school people who use this method to review their mailing lists assume that people will reply if they want to be removed from the list. Others require that people send a card annually asking to be kept on the list. In both cases we need to ask ourselves if we want to **minimize** — or **maximize** — our mailing lists. The answer to that will be influenced by the audience and the purpose of the publication.

We want all parents to receive the district and building-level newsletters. We want all business people to receive our annual financial publication as well as newsletters. Perhaps all former board members do not automatically want to receive a weekly mailing. They need to be given the opportunity to say "thanks, but I have new interests which require my time."

Entering School Publications Contests

Many school publishers look forward to an annual publications contest to have their work judged and/or critiqued. The value of these contests might be questioned by some, but most school people value the honor associated with being recognized for outstanding work in their field. School writers and editors benefit from criticism and suggestions by professionals.

School people should not, however, design their publications with the single goal of winning a contest. All publications should be designed to meet local needs. They should be produced only when they are required to communicate to a specific audience.

Judges of school publications will be quick to recognize the piece which is lacking in purpose, too expensive, or attractive but shallow. Color should be used with caution. Many school publishers fall into "the color trap" — that is, too much color. **When in doubt, keep it simple.**

Strive for Product Recognition

Our school publication might be considered our "product." We want our product to be attractive and easily recognized. We want it to be viewed as an extension of our basic school program. We want it to be recognized as part of our commitment to quality.

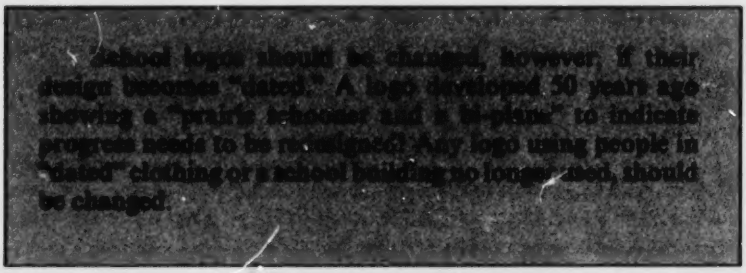
School people who want to establish an image for their publications should consider several basic needs such as: (1) an attractive

logo; (2) a standard banner or masthead; and (3) consistent paper and ink color. Each of these points merit careful consideration.

A school logo, or "trademark," is essential as we begin to strive for **product recognition.** Each school should have its symbol — its standard way of stating its name. Once established, the logo should always be used without modification.

A logo should not be taken apart or altered by any designer for any reason. The logo may be used in different sizes and different colors, or the rule may be that color is an essential part of the recognition factor and therefore must not vary.

A school logo should not be changed for years — unless there is a major change in the school program or school image. The logo may be created by an especially talented student, teacher, or parent. Whenever possible, the opinion of a professional designer should be sought. Once the logo is "adopted," it should appear in every publication. It should be given a strategic location on every printed piece.


School logos should be changed, however, if their design becomes "dated." A logo developed 30 years ago showing a "prairie schooner and a bi-plane" to indicate progress needs to be re-designed. Any logo using people in "dated" clothing or a school building no longer used, should be changed.

School newsletters and similar school reports published several times a year should have a standard look. The basic design should not vary from one issue to the next. School publications will benefit from increased readership if they are designed around a standard format.

If the newsletter is a standard 8½ x 11-inch format, the top three or four inches of page one should always be the **standard banner** for the publication. The banner should include the name of the publication and any particular art associated with the name. It may include the school logo. The banner may be printed in a different ink color from time to time, but the content should not change. Readers should be able to recognize their school newsletter instantly.

The size and format of a particular publication should be

consistent from one issue to the next. It should always be 8½ x 11 or 8½ x 14 or 11 x 17. The type should be set in a consistent style. Once the design is established, it should not be changed. It needs time —at least several issues — to begin to acquire an immediate reader recognition.

The selection of a type face and type size should be considered for readability and overall appearance. The school publication person should ask the printer or typesetter for a **type sample sheet,** or booklet, and ask for suggestions. Since readers become comfortable with a certain type face, it is best to keep a consistent type for each publication. (See Appendix B.)

Most people are uncomfortable, consciously or unconsciously, with the newsletter which suddenly appears in mid-December printed in green or red ink.

If black ink is used all year, a holiday issue should be no different. Few people will bother to read a newsletter with body copy printed in holly green or Valentine's Day red. Spot colors for design, such as borders, headlines, shaded blocks, etc., may be printed in holiday colors — but the body copy should remain black in all issues year-round.

Good design will help our publication be recognized as representative of a good organization. "Product recognition" will increase dramatically.

Chapter 3
Different Publications For Different Publics

Whenever school people depend on a single publication to serve a total community, they make a serious mistake. A district-wide newsletter which is mailed to all postal patrons must be concerned about big topics to attract widespread interest. In the past,

school people erroneously assumed they could write for the total community by beginning "**Dear Parent.**" School people are realizing that as few as 25% of the community residents should be addressed "Dear Parent." Most residents in most communities are not parents of school-age children.

An increasing number of school administrators are creating publications which interest people of all ages — parents and "non-parents," senior citizens as well as the young, single, community resident.

Topics of limited interest should be saved for special topic publications. An announcement of the winners of a building-level spelling bee will interest students and parents in that particular school. An article explaining how spelling is taught in different schools and to students of different ages could be interesting to many people.

The Building Level Newsletter

A friendly newsletter from a neighborhood school should be the top priority in any school district publications effort. There is no substitute for the newsletter which is written for parents, students, and neighbors of a particular school. The neighborhood elementary school staff has an excellent opportunity to develop good school-community relations by spending time, energy, and small amounts of money on a **regularly published newsletter.**

In order to be timely and effective, the building-level newsletter should be published at least six times during the school year. Such a schedule would probably require copies dated August, October, December, February, April, and June. We suggest August because there are always those back-to-school information items which should be sent to parents **before** school opens. We believe the August/September issue should be a preview for the year and the June issue should summarize the events of the year. **We should tell our readers what will happen, what is happening, and what has happened.**

A building-level newsletter can be a friendly and interesting publication. With a focus on people and lots of short, "newsy" items, and plenty of human interest features, the newsletter can help people to understand their neighborhood school and the people who make it work. A newsletter can be published with a degree of "affection." (See Appendix C.)

The School-Community Activity Calendar

A comprehensive calendar of school events and programs will prove valuable on several "fronts." The coordination of events will be helpful to many. Parents with children in both elementary and middle schools can't attend events in both schools on the same night. When dates are selected and events planned with a thought for others' plans, everyone benefits.

Most school calendars are published in a standard format, 8½ x 11, with a page for each month and several pages for parent handbook information. Most calendars are done in a 32-page self-cover format. Calendars will be more attractive whenever student artwork or photographs are used along with all the factual information.

Once the calendar is printed, everyone should make an effort to keep changes to a minimum. Parents will learn to depend on a calendar which **proves accurate for a full school year.** Administrators and activity sponsors should be encouraged to plan carefully and live by the plan.

Dates should be collected and checked against a master checklist during June and July. Calendars should be printed in August and distributed in late August or during the first week of September.

Since the calendar will include all holidays, early dismissal dates, and special event schedules, distribution should include many community people. A typical distribution checklist might include:

- police officers
- crossing guards
- clergy
- local school administrators
- physicians and dentists
- business people

Those who may be planning their first edition of a local school-community calendar should collect calendars from other districts or agencies and make a checklist of events. Many good activity calendars are being published by school administrators. Some are even paid for by local banks, realtors, or industries. Most calendars are printed on basic offset paper with little color and few, if any, special effects. One caution — the calendar will be used for a school year. Make sure you provide a 12-month calendar (not a 9 month one). Most people use the school calendar as their basic family calendar and plan yearlong activities with it.

The Annual Report

School administrators and school boards frequently want an annual publication to demonstrate accountability — a report of their activities. The school publications person will exercise caution to make sure the report is not too elaborate, or simply designed to make a few key people look good. Obviously good publications will almost always make leaders "look good."

A comprehensive report will deal with problems as well as accomplishments. An annual report can be printed on newsprint in a tabloid format. It can be inexpensive and distributed with a local newspaper or mailed to all postal patrons. Another option is the "glossy" expensive looking report which is distributed to a **very select list** of community leaders — the "movers and shakers" of the community.

Guidance Publications

Some of the best opportunities to produce school publications which make a difference for students are in the area of guidance services and counseling. Elementary and secondary counselors deal with many concerns which lend themselves to quality school publications. Examples of these at the secondary level include: (1) the Program of Studies, (2) College Selection Guide, (3) How To Interview For A Job, (4) Financial Aid Guide For Higher Education, (5) Concerns About Withdrawing From School, and (6) What To Expect From Your School Counselor.

Guidance and counseling publications should be written to help students and parents in the decision-making process. Parents will support school publications whenever they see a direct benefit to their children.

Chapter 4
Evaluation

Evaluating publications is not an exact science, but is essential if they are to provide the communication channel for which they were designed. Many districts use a simple coupon in their newsletters or bulletins to seek feedback. Others send out annual readership surveys to those who receive the publications asking them to rate it on a number of criteria and suggest ways it could be improved.

Judges of the annual school and college publication contest sponsored by the National School Public Relations Association, review over 1200 publications each year. Their comments provide valuable insights for those seeking to improve their publications and can well be used as evaluative criteria.

1. Winning publications are written for the information needs and interests of the audience for which they were designed and feature attractive and uncomplicated design.
2. The layout of publications should be functional rather than ornate. The layout should invite the audience to look and to read. Use ample white space, legible typefaces and varied heading sizes.
3. The quality of a finished publication is not always directly related to the dollars spent. Some four-color brochures are gaudy and overdone, while more inexpensive two-color flyers use a second color effectively to emphasize key concepts.
4. The best photos have good contrast, show excellent detail, are well cropped and show live action.
5. Winning publications have artwork that is carefully tied with content and objectives and the illustrations are professionally done.

Contest judges provided suggestions for specific publications which they felt made them "winners." These included:

- **Annual Reports:** Top entries in this category not only reported on the year past, but provided a perspective on the year ahead. The best reports made extensive use of pictures of students and faculty in action.

- **Community Newsletters:** The judges had high praise for those publications that made good use of direct quotations from students and faculty about school activities. The use of jargon, the failure to explain technical terms and to supply needed details, and heavy-handed writing were the chief criticism judges had of poor community newsletters
- **Finance:** The best publications in this category offer much of the budget information in graphs, charts and tables that readers can easily understand.
- **Internal:** The best publications are those that remember that internal audiences should be treated differently than external audiences. Good publications should include information of interest to the professional and professional support staffs.
- **Handbooks:** Effective student handbooks are those that "tune in to students." They are written in language the student can easily understand. The best handbooks place the information needed by students up front and the rules and regulations in the back.
- **Board Meetings:** A publication that introduces the public to a board meeting should use the opportunity to explain exactly what the board does. The judges suggested that a board meeting publication should explain through example how a policy is enacted, how ideas originate, whether the board consults experts and when the public can have its say, etc.

In addition to feedback coupons printed in publications, readership surveys, and a review of suggestions provided for "winning" publications, many districts find an evaluation committee helpful in assessing their publications. Such a committee is drawn together from the ranks of those for whom the particular publication is designed — from community professionals from the media, publications, public relations area — and the school district staff. A check-list is developed to assist the committee in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the publication and providing suggestions for improvement.

Chapter 5
Schools Publish Because There Is a Need

In summary, it should be stressed that school people publish because there is an obvious need to share information with large numbers of people. School people should not publish because of tradition or a sense of obligation. When the need is understood, when the consumer's viewpoint is valued, and when the publication is written to meet the consumer's need — **good school publications will result.**

Each school administrator should collect samples of strong and weak school publications and those they like and dislike. A review of these samples will provide a valuable resource in planning new district publications and critiquing present ones with an eye toward improvement.

Good textbooks are available on graphics and publications. Good workshops and seminars are held in many cities. Good speakers are available on the topic. But the success of each school publication begins with the writer/editor and/or publisher's own commitment, and sensitivity.

APPENDIX A

NORTH PENN SCHOOL DISTRICT
Lansdale, PA 19446

SPECIFICATIONS

PRINTING OF SCHOOL DISTRICT CALENDAR -- 1980-1981

QUANTITY:	10,000
DESCRIPTION:	School District Calendar for the year September, 1980 to August, 1981
SIZE:	8 1/2 x 11 inches finished, with top fold, two staples
NUMBER OF PAGES:	32 pages
PAPER:	Opaque Offset 60 lb. weight
INK:	All pages - colors A and B (PMS numbers to be supplied)
PHOTOGRAPHS:	22 photographs
PRINTING:	Average of eighty (80) lines of copy per month to be placed on calendar date blocks. (see sample)
SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:	Camera Ready Copy will be submitted for all pages except the calendar date block pages.
	Finished calendar -- all pages punched in center/bottom, to facilitate hanging.
DELIVERY:	A distribution schedule will be provided listing the total number of calendars to be delivered to each district school.

Proof pages must be supplied for all copy showing completed work, prior to final press run. (Galley proofs and blue lines)

Copy will be complete by August 8, 1980 -- 4:00 p.m.

Delivery must be made by August 29, 1980 -- 9:00 a.m.

QUOTATION: 10,000 copies

President

QUESTIONS ?

Company

Contact Ken Weir

(215) 368-0400, ext. 215

Address

APPENDIX B

MEGARON MEDIUM

The cost of this original building, including the grading of the grounds, repairs, etc., up to the year 1827 was $2,432,851. By 1851 the expanding needs

MEGARON MEDIUM ITALIC

of Congress made additions to the Capitol necessary. From several plans submitted, those drawn by the famed Philadelphia architect, Thomas U. Wal-

MEGARON MEDIUM CONDENSED

ter, for the extension of the Senate and House wings were selected. On July 4, 1851, the cornerstone of the extension was laid in the northeast corner of the

MEGARON MEDIUM ITALIC CONDENSED

House wing by President Millard Fillmore. Daniel Webster, Secretary of State, delivered the oration. During his tenure as Architect of the Capitol from 1851 until

MEGARON MEDIUM EXTENDED

1865, Thomas U. Walter directed the construction of the Senate and House wings. The exterior marble came from quarries at Lee, Mass.,

MEGARON BOLD OUTLINE

and the marble for the columns was quarried at Cockeysville, Md. The present House Chamber was occupied December 16, 1857, and the Senate first met

MEGARON BOLD CONDENSED

in its present Chamber on January 4, 1859. The addition of the Senate and House wings made the construction of a new dome necessary for the preservation of good architectural

MEGARON BOLD EXTENDED

proportions. Between 1856 and 1865 the old low wooden dome was replaced with the now familiar cast iron structure de-

MEGARON EXTRA BOLD

signed by Thomas U. Walter. The overall width of the dome at the base is 135 feet 5 inches. The rotunda, or interior of the

MEGARON EXTRA BOLD CONDENSED

dome is 96 feet in diameter, and the height from the floor to the apex of the Brumidi fresco in the canopy is 180 feet 3 inches.

Provided by Nova Composition & Graphics, Falls Church, Virginia

APPENDIX C

A NEWSLETTER NEEDS AFFECTION

The four-page newsletter can be the most cost-effective, and potentially the most useful, medium that any local education association, PTA or school system can support. To realize its potential, the newsletter needs more than care — it needs affection. Only as some one person devotes time and warm concern to the publication will it succeed in its objectives.

The newsletter should reach the reader with an almost hearty salutation — "Hello, read me!" The four pages will be filled with legible and clear lines of type; copy will not crowd the pages; the reader won't have to strain his eye or mind to get at the words, sentences and paragraphs. There will be no tricky layouts.

Next thing to watch is the tone of the newsletter. The cute, the witty, the superurbane, the clever have no place in an organization's newsletter. Readers are likely to be turned off by the smart-alec approach. Also bad is the approach of the scholar, the statistician, the moralist. The local newsletter should have the tone of one friend writing to another — and filling his communication with useful, interesting and inspiring material. Names, places, events are the first three ingredients of the newsletter. Discussion of ideas, concepts and issues are the next three.

A newsletter is not a record of what is past, to be filed in the archives. It is a harbinger. What's next, what's coming up, what are the future developments — these are the true concerns of the newsletter.

Frequency and regularity of issue are important. Your reader should learn to expect the newsletter at a specific time. If you as editor or publisher are not serious enough about your publication to see that it is published on an established frequency, why should the reader be expected to take it seriously?

— Author unknown

APPENDIX D

SOME WORDS ABOUT WRITING

WRITE–ABILITY MAKES FOR READABILITY

That effervescent and dedicated teacher of readability, Edgar Dale, gives us this lesson in "write-ability" . . .

- **Define your audience and purpose.** If you are writing a pamphlet on mental health to be read by nearly all adults, you must ask two questions: What do they want to know? What do they need to know? You must get into the reader's shoes, and think and feel as he does, be as ignorant or as bright as he is.

- **Avoid a lengthy introduction.** Catch your reader's attention quickly. Use a short introduction, if any, to make quite clear what is coming, the questions that will be answered. This, too, will help you sharpen the logic of the material.

- **Tell a logical story.** Study your key points and note the basic arguments and ideas being presented.

- **Make your key points visible.** A reader should be able to skim your article, see quickly what it says, decide whether he wants to read it. Therefore, visual guides can make the article clearer and more inviting. Sometimes you can help the reader by subheads, italics, boldface, or by numbering the points made. You can spread your material out typographically, make it less dense in appearance by more paragraphing. Aerate your material, let it breathe, let the white paper show up more.

- **Invite reader involvement.** All reading material explicitly or implicitly answers the questions of the reader.

- **Use pointed examples** You can simplify and clarify an article by inserting examples. Many highly condensed articles need illustrations.

- **Simplify the vocabulary.**

- **Watch your sentence structure.** Sentences may become too long and too involved by much qualification. This may be necessary when writing for fellow specialists, but not for laymen. Remove unnecessary qualification and make necessary qualification more visible. It is the complexity of the sentence and not its length that is the chief cause of its hardness. Shortening, therefore, may not help but hinder.

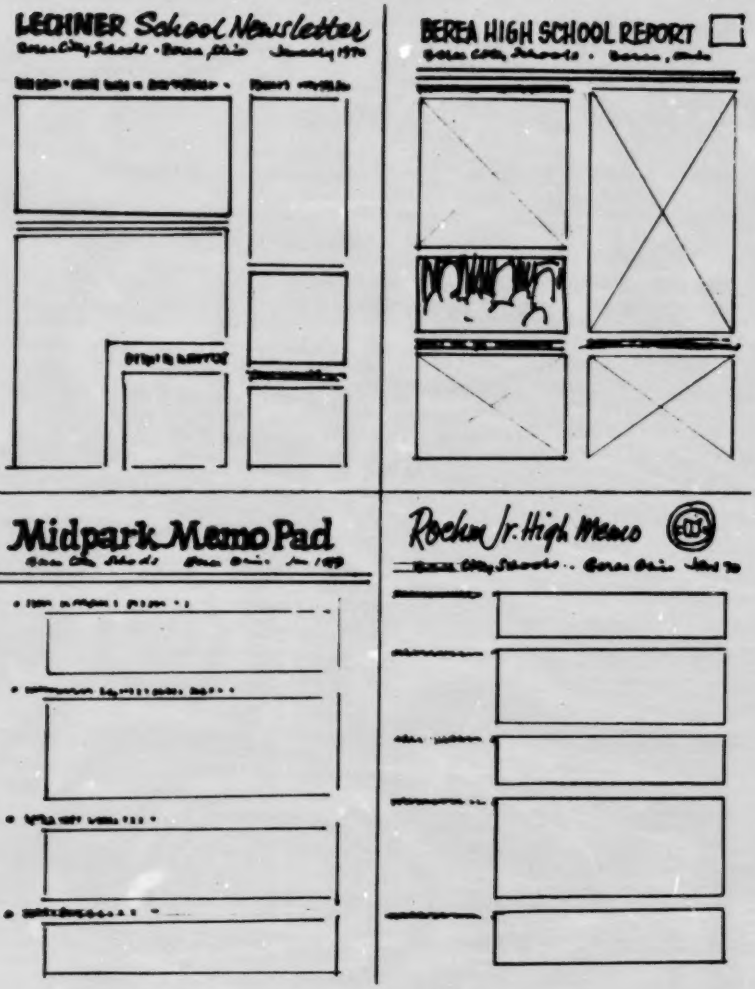
- **Use visual material.** Simple drawings, graphs, and maps may sharpen your presentation. Do not, however, use visual materials just for the sake of using them.

- **Repeat and summarize thoughtfully.** As you approach the end of your article you should be answering the reader's questions: So what? Why this extended discussion?

Contributed by:
Mr. Jack R. Gillespie, Executive Director
Education Press Association of America
Glassboro, New Jersey

APPENDIX E

Sample Page Layouts



APPENDIX F

BUTLER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

SCHOOL ACTIVITIES CALENDAR 1978-79

APPENDIX G

The main business of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), formed in 1935, is to help bring about better citizen understanding of the objectives, accomplishments, and needs of schools. NSPRA's mission is to build support for education through responsible public relations and communication.

If the duties of your position call for communicating with the public or others in the field of education, NSPRA membership is a must for you. NSPRA member services include: *PARAGRAPHS* (member newsletter), Public Relations Resource Center, Research Assistance, PR Hotline Counseling Service, Personnel Clearinghouse, National Representation, reduced rates for members at NSPRA's annual National Seminar and a voluntary accreditation program. There are four categories of NSPRA membership: institutional, professional, associate, and student.

Other NSPRA Products, Services and Activities include: *EDUCATION USA, IT STARTS IN THE CLASSROOM* and *FEDERAL FUNDING ALERT* newsletters; workshops and consulting services; special publications and audiovisual materials.

To order additional titles of "*Basic School PR Guides,*" or to obtain information about NSPRA membership, products and services, contact: National School Public Relations Association, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209, (703) 528-5840.